NATURAL NEWS

The Field Museum
Exploring
The Earth And Its
People

WEEKLY STAFF NEWSLETTER
April 10, 1998

All volunteers and staff invited ...

Get the scoop straight from the source

STAFF TALK
by John McCarter

Monday, April 20, 1998
Montgomery Ward Hall

Choose your time:
9:00 a.m. OR
same speech again at 4:00 p.m.

THAT TROLLEY AGAIN -- HOORAY!

The Museum Campus Trolley Service dates have been extended. The service was originally scheduled to cease on April 3, but new dates have been added. Service will be provided from Sunday, April 5 through Thursday, April 16 to accommodate the Easter/Passover holiday and later spring break schedules.

Four trolleys will be in service from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., providing a convenient connection between the Park District lots and the Campus Museums.

Submitted by **Gene Dillenburg**

Blame it on "El Niño"

Curator **Michael Dillon** (Botany), recently returned from six weeks of field studies in Peru, supported by a NSF - SGER grant to study the effects of the 1997/98 ENSO ("El Niño") event. The trip began (3 Feb '98) on an inauspicious note when powerful storms packing tornadoes and heavy rains hit Miami, the first stop on the way to Peru. The flight to Lima was delayed and reports stated that "El Niño was to blame." El Niño conditions were in full swing when Dillon arrived. The ocean surface temperatures off the coast of northern Peru and southern Ecuador have been elevated since mid-1997, causing high air temperatures (85-95°F), high humidity and torrential rains. The northern Peruvian cities of Chiclayo, Piura, and Tumbes were isolated by swollen rivers that destroyed bridges and highways and a huge lake (6,000 sq. kms) formed in the Sechura desert of Piura. Travel was blocked to the north, south, and east of Trujillo by flooding and landslides. At one point, an earthen dam above Trujillo broke, flooding the entire city with nearly two feet of water. The resulting flood swept through a graveyard, bringing caskets, bones and bodies flowing into city streets. It was mayhem for several days. The mud from the flood eventually dried up and created dust that caused respiratory

illness, allergies and other symptoms in many of the residents.

After conditions normalized, Dillon and two other scientists drove from Trujillo to Tacna (border with Chile), a round-trip of 4200 kms (2600 miles) to collect and photograph the coastal plant communities. Paradoxically, the regions south of Lima were experiencing drought. Fortunately, rains in late 1997 had stimulated plant growth that was persisting. After returning to Trujillo in early March, the situation had deteriorated further and once again overland travel was impossible. Epidemics of cholera and conjunctivitis accelerated. In Peru alone, current estimates credit El Niño with over 200 dead, 300,000 homeless, and extensive damages to crops, highways, and infrastructure. The body of hot water associated with El Niño conditions is now beginning to dissipate, but rains are continuing in northern and central Peru.

The trip ended as it began. In the middle of the night on the return trip to Miami, Dillon's plane lost its electrical generator and was forced to land in Panama City, Panama for a seven-hour delay. The crew said that "El Niño was to blame" and the headlines on the local Panamanian papers discussed the impact of El Niño on the waters of the Panama Canal. Dillon will return to Peru in late May to continue observations.

And by the way, "El Niño was to blame" for the "non-winter" winter with warm temperatures and little snowfall similar to that of 1983.

BORNEO'S BURNING

*The following is an excerpt from a report that **Bob Inger** (Curator Emeritus, Zoology) sent to us from Borneo.....*

In case you didn't already know, the air here is not good. There has been no rain, none, since last December. At these temperatures (daily highs in the 90's) that spells serious drought. There are fires everywhere, leaving the air throughout the west coast of Sabah smoky. Even the capitol city of Kuala Lumpur 1500 miles to the west was smoky. The air has affected my voice so that often I merely squeak while at other times I have a hoarse baritone. I chatted with a doctor who says she sees patients who have various troubles associated with serious air pollution. Since there have been no electrical storms, I can only conclude that the fires are caused by you-know-who, critters that look like you and me. Most of the fires begin at the roadsides so I speculate that discarded cigarette butts start many of them. I saw men who work in the forest smoking. Is there intelligent life on Earth? Of course, since this drought is almost unprecedented, I have never seen the forest this dry. No leeches at all; the poor dears must be tucked away deep in the crevices. Naturally this weather has put a crimp in the frog activity. In two hours on one night transect we saw only twenty-two frogs, about one-third or one-fourth of our count under normal conditions. Twenty forest floor quadrats yielded only one frog! We saw very few insects or spiders in the quadrats and absolutely no earthworms. Well that's life at the end of the twentieth century. I feel very lucky to have worked here before the period of economic development. But of course, I'm an outsider and have always had the benefit of returning to an affluent society.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Visit by South African "Angels"

Visitors from the Guardian Angel's College in South Africa were hosted at The Field Museum on April 2 by Shaun and Andy Block, and by the Museum's high school museology students. Our South African guests (forty-six students and six teachers) went on tours of the Eskimo Hall and the Pawnee Earth Lodge, then had lunch with the museology students in the Founders' Room. The rest of the afternoon was spent informally with the museology students, as the teens went off touring, talking, laughing and chatting throughout the Museum. It was an exciting afternoon of teens coming together and having fun.

To commemorate the fifth anniversary of the reopening of Ruatepupuke, **Mary Ann Bloom** and Maori Meeting House volunteers **Peter Buol, Darlene Murray, Gabrielle Powell and Dell Yarnell** were interviewed, via telephone, on Te Reo Iriangi o Aotearoa Radio New Zealand. They sent greetings to the family in Tokomau Bay, and talked about facilitating with visitors who enjoy the Maori Meeting House. We are looking forward to the visit of Maori artists who currently have a show at the Beacon Street Gallery.

By **Mary Ann Bloom**

The *Natural News* is edited by Carolyn Klyce in the President's Office. The deadline is Tuesday noon. Please submit via email to klyce@fmnh.org.

NEW ID'S – GOT YOURS YET?

Security Services is in the process of taking photos for the new ID cards that will be issued soon. If you have not already had your picture taken, please follow the schedule below. Pictures will be taken in the Security Equipment Office between the hours of 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

DAY	LAST NAME
Monday, April 13	A-D
Tuesday, April 14	E-H
Wednesday, April 15	I-M
Thursday, April 16	N-S
Friday, April 17	T-Z
	(and all make-ups)

Volunteers and anyone unable to come in on your scheduled day, or on April 17, may come in on any day.

Final Dates Set for Members' Nights 1998

July 23 and 24, 1998

The former dates of June 18 and 19 were changed due to a conflict with the use of the Soldier Field lots. The Museum will be open from 5:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. on both evenings. The third and fourth floors will close at 9:00 as usual. Please remember that all guidebook copy and signage requests are still due on Friday, April 17. Call extension 453 with any questions.

NOON BALLOON

Join us for a special Noon Balloon, Tuesday, 14 April at 12:00 AM in the Zoology Classroom. Get a glimpse of field work the way it used to be with a special showing of a film from the museum archives. The film is of the 1941 Mandel Galapagos Expedition and will be narrated by expedition member and curator emeritus of birds, **Mel Traylor.**

BEARS 1998/99 SCHEDULE

The Bears have announced their 1998 schedule. The home games, of course, impact us all.

Sunday	Sept. 6	HOME vs. Jacksonville Noon
Sunday	Sept. 13	at Pittsburgh
Sunday	Sept. 20	at Tampa Bay
Sunday	Sept. 27	HOME vs. Minnesota 3:15 p.m.
Sunday	Oct. 4	HOME vs. Detroit Noon
Sunday	Oct. 11	at Arizona
Sunday	Oct. 18	HOME vs. Dallas 3:15 p.m.
Sunday	Oct. 25	at Tennessee
Sunday	Nov. 1	no game
Sunday	Nov. 8	HOME vs. St. Louis Noon
Sunday	Nov. 15	at Detroit
Sunday	Nov. 22	at Atlanta
Sunday	Nov. 29	HOME vs. Tampa Bay Noon
Sunday	Dec. 6	at Minnesota
Sunday	Dec. 13	at Green Bay
Sunday	Dec. 20	HOME vs. Baltimore Noon
Sunday	Dec. 27	HOME vs. Green Bay Noon

There will also be two home pre-season games in August. – **Gene Dillenburg**

Museum Food Service

In an effort to lay the base for a successful relationship you may now begin, and are encouraged, to order food service from Corner Bakery. A menu will be printed in next week's *Natural News*. For breakfast, lunch and refreshments contact **Sandy Johnston** (x864) or **Jamie Green** (x495. All orders must go through Special Events and be accompanied with a department account number and an authorized signature. The paperwork will then be processed through the Finance Department. A twenty-four hour lead-time on all orders is mandatory. There is a tem-person minimum until Corner Bakery is on site. For any event which Corner Bakery is not appropriate Special Events will then outline your options.